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ABSTRACT

This document identifies strategies and procedures to overcome obstacles that hinder enrollment in vocational education programs identified by a task force of superintendents, center directors, principals, teachers, central office staff, state agency, guidance personnel, and representatives of the private sector in South Carolina. The document includes a listing of 10 broad categories of obstacles that hinder enrollment in vocational education with 5 to 15 strategies and procedures suggested for overcoming each of the obstacles. The obstacles were identified as follows: the image of vocational education, lack of parent involvement, failure to obtain adequate funding for vocational education, lack of extensive and active involvement of business and industry, administrative leadership, the guidance program, course schedules, graduation requirements, obstacles that prevent students with special needs from enrolling, and inadequate articulation between school districts and the technical education system. (CML)

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SUGGESTED STRATEGIES AND PROCEDURES
FOR
OVERCOMING OBSTACLES IN SCHEDULING STUDENTS
INTO
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

January 1990

South Carolina Department of Education

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The South Carolina Department of Education: An Equal Opportunity Agency

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INTRODUCTION

In the past several years there has been a significant drop in the number of students enrolling in vocational education programs. Since schools have the responsibility of educating people for life, and the quality of life is determined in large measure by the work one does, this drop in enrollment has caused apprehension among educators. Concern deepened with the realization that half of our high school graduates do not continue their education in technical schools, colleges or other institutions after high school. Thus, formal education for work in many cases occurs in high school or not at all. Knowing that there is a technical manpower shortage, that the present and future work force must be qualified to meet the demands of the workplace, that trained workers correlate positively to economic growth, and that students have individual learning styles and needs to be met, the negative impact of the drop in vocational education enrollment called for action to determine the reasons for the decline and fix the problem.

Investigation provided insight into the problem. Decreases in the overall high school enrollment, increases in science and foreign language requirements, as well as increased requirements relative to the high school exit examination, may have resulted in decreased vocational program enrollment. Also, in some instances there were difficulties in scheduling into appropriate courses students who desired or needed vocational programs. Possible obstacles in the way of enrollment opportunities for vocational education needed to be identified and overcome. The effort to identify obstacles and develop strategies and procedures to surmount them resulted in this document, which is shared in the hope that the information will be used as appropriate to local situations.

Moody Oswald, Director
Office of Vocational Education

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Obstacles at times prevent students from enrolling in vocational education programs. Students who desire and/or need these courses should be able to enroll in them. There is a need to implement strategies and procedures to overcome the hurdles that hinder enrollment in vocational education programs.

PLAN OF ACTION TO DEVELOP RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES AND PROCEDURES

The Office of Vocational Education formed a task force to identify effective strategies and procedures for scheduling students into vocational education programs. In meetings on October 18 and December 6, 1989, and through work done between and after these meetings, possible obstacles to enrollment opportunities were identified and strategies and procedures developed to overcome these barriers. All strategies and procedures might not be appropriate to each particular situation in the State, but they are shared with school districts in the hope that they will be adopted or utilized as appropriate to each local situation. They might also serve as a catalyst to develop even better ideas.

The task force consisted of superintendents, center directors, principals, teachers, central office staff, state agency, and guidance personnel--people who have had successes and problems in the areas of enrollment and scheduling. Representatives from the private sector served also. Members of the task force were:

Mr. Don Dempsey, Director
Vocational Education, Greenville

Mr. Larry Hughes, Director
Florence Career Center

Ms. Carolyn Lesslie, Teacher
Rock Hill Career Development Center

Mr. Ken Lake, Director
Lexington One Area Vocational Center

Dr. Ken Alexander, Principal
Laurens District 55 High School

Mr. Alonzo Lewis, Teacher
Wilson Vocational Center

Dr. Samuel Wooten, Superintendent
Chester County School District

Mr. Robert Falls, Superintendent
Kershaw County School District

Dr. Sylvia Weinberg, Superintendent
Clarendon School District #2

Mr. James Wilson, Principal
Hillcrest High School

Dr. Wray O. Smith, Principal
Dorman High School

Mr. Bill Noonan, Human Resource Manager
Campbell Soup Company

Ms. Harriet Blanton, Principal
North Myrtle Beach High School

Ms. Eleanor Herlong, Guidance
Rock Hill Career Development Center

Mr. Nicholas Perkins, Guidance
R. P. Dawkins Middle School

Ms. Carolyn Donges, Consultant
Secondary Guidance, SDE

Ms. Linda Lee, Guidance
Marlboro County High School

Mrs. Mildred Bagnal, Director
Adult/Vocational Education, Lexington #2

Mr. Harry Hamilton, Principal
Seneca High School

Mr. Gordon Chipukites, Director
Colleton County Area Vocational Center

Mr. Sal Fede, Director
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Adult/Vocational Education, Pickens

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Mr. Lee Sloan, Coordinator
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Ms. Dawn Abell, Executive Assistant
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ORGANIZATION OF INFORMATION: STRATEGIES AND PROCEDURES TO CONSIDER

The purpose of this section is to present possible obstacles to enrollment opportunities in vocational education, as identified by the special task force, and to propose its ideas regarding strategies and procedures that might be used to overcome the impediments.

In the first meeting the task force brainstormed 46 possible obstacles. These were synthesized into ten broad categories to which possible solutions were suggested. The ten categories and suggested courses of action to surmount them are given on the following pages. The obstacles are not listed in any particular order of importance.

Obstacle I. The image of vocational education hinders enrollment opportunities. This possible obstacle includes such things as the lack of knowledge about vocational education's purpose and curriculum that is held by the community and school, a four-year degree mind-set, the artificial division between academic and vocational education, the attitude that colleges take toward vocational courses, etc. The task force suggested the following strategies and procedures for use in overcoming this obstacle.

1. School districts should re-examine philosophies, goals and objectives to assure provision of employability skills.

2. School districts should promote staff meetings to bring academic and vocational teachers together to develop strategies for presenting subject matter.

3. School districts should utilize vocational education program standards to assure top quality programs.

4. School districts should designate public relations specialists to inform the public of the advantages of education programs, including vocational-technical education. Schools should increase public awareness of educational goals and purposes. Educators at all levels should provide public relations materials.

5. School districts should develop and distribute brochures that provide well organized information in areas such as course selection outlines with career possibilities, curriculum offerings, names of businesses and industries that employ students, business/industry expectations, post-secondary institutions' expectations and programs, etc.

6. An exchange day for academic and vocational teachers should be developed and implemented by school districts.

7. School districts should implement a program that allows teacher exchange to give instruction in particular units: i.e., a Heating and Air Conditioning instructor teaches a unit in science, a mathematics instructor teaches a unit on measurement in Machine Shop or Building Construction.

8. Vocational educators should maintain a professional image in appearance and personal decorum. This includes dress, participation in community and civic organizations, attending functions at feeder schools such as athletic contests, special events, and eating lunch at feeder school lunch rooms. Vocational educators should invest time in students prior to enrollment in vocational courses. They should be more visible at high schools, middle schools and elementary schools.

9. School Board members, school administrators, and others should be invited to participate in activities at the vocational education center/school.

10. School districts should seek pertinent information about careers from business and industry, make this information known to faculty and students, and incorporate it appropriately into the curriculum.

11. High quality tours of vocational facilities should be arranged for elementary school students, with effective pre-tour activities and post-tour activities.

12. Vocational facilities and grounds must be maintained well.

13. Reach out to students through the use of techniques such as: student of the month presentations, peer counseling, have the teacher in each program send out a Star Student Post Card at least once a week, sponsor various contests on the subject of careers, invite program graduates to give testimonials, etc.

14. Change the name "vocational" to something like "applied technology".

15. Administrators could use time on the district's cable television network to promote vocational education.

Obstacle II. The lack of parent involvement hinders enrollment opportunities. This possible obstacle is linked to image. It involves the support of individual parents as well as parents in general. The task force suggested the following strategies and procedures for use in overcoming this obstacle.

1. Student organizations offer an opportunity to link parents to schools. Get parents involved in many student organization activities.

2. Invite parents to serve on advisory committees to the vocational programs in schools. It was suggested that there be at least three parents on each advisory committee. Also, there should be an "academic" teacher on each craft advisory committee.

3. Each vocational teacher should have an objective of having each student's parents in the classroom at least once per year.

4. Vocational educators should reach out to parents through career orientation at churches, civic clubs, and community functions. Brochures or a vocational news letter giving information could be sent in report card folders.

5. Parents could be invited to a Parent/Student Career Dinner, where information could be given and support built for vocational education courses and programs.

6. Parents should be invited to competitive events.

7. Presentations should be systematically made at PTA meetings, especially in the elementary grades.

8. Open House events could be scheduled to include group guidance as related to programs, careers, job-seeking skills, etc.

Obstacle III. Failure to obtain adequate funding for vocational education programs hinders enrollment opportunities. This possible obstacle includes such things as competition for funds, replacing outdated equipment, maintenance, and how to create adequate funding. The task force suggested the following strategies and procedures for use in overcoming this obstacle.

1. It is critical to have a good, functioning advisory committee from business and industry to support the quest for funding of vocational programs.

2. There should be short and long range plans for purchasing equipment, maintenance, supplies, etc.

3. High quality programs with demonstrated results helps in an effort to achieve funding.

4. Seek grants from foundations.

5. In order to remain current, equipment might be leased instead of purchased.

6. Business and industry might donate or loan equipment. With many students participating successfully in cooperative education programs, the possibility of vocational programs receiving donations is increased.

7. Equipment that is presently owned might be utilized more effectively. It might be used in community or adult education courses, for example, which might also help in parent involvement.

8. Convince school boards to budget funds systematically and consistently for vocational education equipment.

9. Systematically add equipment if entire equipment needs cannot be met at once.

10. Share the use of equipment within a district or between districts. Equipment might be shared between the technical education system and vocational education.

11. Co-request equipment with others in the district--maintenance, for example.

Obstacle IV. If business and industry are not involved actively and extensively in vocational education, enrollment opportunities are hindered. The following strategies and procedures for overcoming this possible obstacle were suggested by the task force.

1. Do your homework. Know the needs of local business and industry and demonstrate how you can help meet these needs. Communicate on a regular basis.

2. In cooperation with an appropriate college, offer a course where teachers and administrators go into business and industry to learn how they operate and what they need. The course could be offered in the evening, weekends, or summer. A good example is the Education in Industry course offered in Cherokee County by USC--Spartanburg.

3. Develop a Business/Industry/Education Partnership Committee and cause it to function effectively.

4. Promote an adopt-a-school program in which business and industry give gifts, incentives, etc., to motivate and promote learning.

5. Vocational educators need to be joiners: i.e., be involved in the community, play golf with business and industry leaders, join civic groups, local Chamber of Commerce, etc.

6. If there is an Association of Personnel Managers, utilize this resource to tell your story, provide services, etc.

7. When approaching business or industry for assistance, be very specific in your suggestions as to how they might help and what they could expect in return.

8. Sponsor Business/Industry/Education functions and tell the vocational education story. Also, invite the secretaries from business and industry for a meal.

9. Establish a meaningful award to be given yearly to the business or industry that was an outstanding partner in the cooperative education effort.

10. Organize a speakers' bureau of business and industry supporters of vocational education for use in civic clubs, PTA, and other functions.

11. Contribute articles to the Chamber of Commerce and other newsletters.

12. If a new business or industry opens, contact them, give a warm welcome, and demonstrate the vocational education story.

13. Identify graduates of vocational programs who are contributing to the success of local business and industry and use these people as advocates, resources, or links to their employers.

Obstacle V. Administrative leadership is a factor in either helping or hindering vocational enrollment opportunities. Included in this possible obstacle are considerations such as instructional leadership, quality of programs, teacher preparation and guidance, turf protection, flexibility, personality conflicts among educators, resistance to change, communication, etc. The following strategies and procedures for overcoming this possible obstacle were suggested by the task force.

1. There should be strong evaluation of administrators, teachers and programs in terms of numbers enrolled, completers of programs, skills mastered, and enrollment in second or third levels of courses. Any problems should be corrected.

2. Teamwork should be built among teachers and administrators. There should be meetings at least quarterly to discuss vocational education.

3. Administrators should broaden their perspective by visiting to see what others are doing, and they should keep current by reading a variety of professional journals.

4. Administrators should be active in professional organizations.

5. There should be a vocational director in each school district whose role is clearly defined.

6. Exemplary program guidelines should be established as well as minimal standards.

7. A strong staff development program should be in effect for all teachers, particularly in communication skills, mathematical skills, other basic skills and PET training.

8. High quality advisory committees should be formed and should be utilized extensively.

9. The philosophy and objectives of each school should be reviewed, utilizing teachers, support staff, parents, and appropriate others, to ensure that students are educated for life and work. Curriculum should ensure that philosophy and objectives are met well.

10. Vocational programs should be flexible enough to meet the needs of students and the community. This might include changing schedules or offering courses in the evenings, summer, or weekends.

11. Vocational educators should adhere to high standards and maintain high visibility.

Obstacle VI. The guidance program is a factor in either helping or hindering vocational enrollment opportunities. Included in this possible obstacle are considerations such as counselors' orientation toward college, decision-making process, registration procedures, lack of a comprehensive guidance program, student maturity, values, traditions, sex stereotyping bias, lack of self esteem in some students, etc. The following strategies and procedures for overcoming this possible obstacle were suggested by the task force.

1. School districts should implement a comprehensive career guidance program, encompassing grades K-12.

2. School districts should develop and implement strategies for collaboration and coordination among all counselors in grades K-12.

3. All counselors should be scheduled into staff development programs, conferences and workshops that inform them extensively about vocational education programs.

4. Guidance counselors need to be relieved of non-guidance responsibilities that could prevent them from implementing a high quality career guidance program.

5. School districts should ensure that each student has a personal plan for educational development based upon a career goal.

6. School districts should revitalize the use of SCOIS in middle schools, junior high and high schools.

7. A career planning profile instrument should be administered to students at the 7th or 8th grade level and the results interpreted to each student through group or individual counseling.

8. Area vocational centers should keep feeder school counselors informed of all activities.

9. In the evaluation of school principals, the effectiveness of the guidance program should be included specifically and in some detail.

10. The use of vocational education students and instructors in orienting younger students about vocational programs should be utilized.

11. Counselor education programs should include career education and vocational education content.

12. Students should be given a thorough orientation of vocational education programs and career education concepts well in advance of registration for the next year's courses.

Obstacle VII. The manner in which courses are scheduled may hinder vocational enrollment opportunities. Included in this possible obstacle are considerations such as travel time to area vocational centers, number of courses available, course structure--3-3, 3-2-1, 2-2-2, 6 or 7 period day, policy regarding work release, retention and remediation, flexibility, etc. The strategies and procedures listed below were suggested by the task force as possible courses of action to overcome this obstacle.

1. A seven period day is recommended to allow students more opportunities for a more diversified curriculum.

2. More flexibility should be provided in the structuring of vocational education courses and programs.

3. School districts should review the number and quality of elective courses offered and how these courses impact on realistic career decisions.

4. School districts should develop a curriculum that provides students the skills necessary for entry into the work force.

5. Courses required for graduation, applied academic courses, and remedial courses could be offered at area vocational education centers.

6. School district policy should provide for the timely release of students from school for cooperative education purposes.

7. Innovative vocational programs being offered at any grade level should be publicized.

8. The readability and dissemination of vocational education orientation materials for use by teachers and students at all grade levels should be enhanced.

9. The utilization of school facilities should be maximized.

10. Encourage innovative, competency based curriculum that might allow for open-entry and open-exit of students.

Obstacle VIII. Graduation requirements might hinder enrollment opportunities in vocational education programs. Included in this possible obstacle are considerations such as remediation and Defined Minimum Program requirements, elective status of vocational courses, tracking, foreign language requirement for admission into State colleges, vocational course weightings for class rank, etc. The strategies and procedures listed below were suggested by the task force as possible courses of action to overcome this obstacle.

1. School districts should evaluate curricular tracks and make necessary adjustments to meet the needs of all students.

2. The Defined Minimum Program should be reviewed and modified at the State level to provide for more creative flexibility in all programs.

3. Remediation could be offered in classes established at area vocational centers.

4. Review vocational program offerings for possible comparable weighting with academic offerings in the process of determining class ranking status.

5. The State Department of Education should identify vocational education courses that meet specific requirements for graduation.

Obstacle IX. There may be obstacles that prevent students with special needs from enrolling in vocational education programs. The task force suggested the following strategies and procedures that might be used to overcome obstacles in this area.

1. Curricular offerings should address the needs of special students.

2. Instructional modifications in teaching methods and materials should address the needs of special students.

3. Supplementary assistance, aids, materials, etc., should be provided for special students who need support services.

4. Students with special needs should be identified so that vocational instructors are aware of their characteristics, abilities and needs.

5. An adaptive vocational component of the individualized education program (IEP) should be developed to meet the special needs of handicapped students.

6. The vocational instructor or representative should have input into the development of the IEP (including attending the IEP meetings) for handicapped students with special vocational needs.

7. Staff development concerning techniques in teaching special needs students should be conducted for vocational instructors.

8. Special support services should be provided for vocational teachers serving students with special needs.

9. Guidance, special education, and vocational staff should work together to coordinate the delivery of vocational instruction for students with special needs.

10. Recognition should be provided for vocational teachers who are especially effective in meeting the special needs of students.

11. A "job coach" should be considered as a position to assist the special needs student in making the transition from school to work.

Obstacle X. Inadequate articulation between school districts and the technical education system might hinder enrollment in vocational education programs at the high school level and post-secondary level. The task force suggested the following strategies and procedures for use in overcoming this obstacle.

1. Articulation agreements should be developed, enhanced and implemented effectively between vocational education programs and post-secondary institutions' programs--to include faculty, facilities and other resources.

2. Articulation of the entire education process, grades K-12, should be promoted--to include curriculum, facilities, staff and other resources.

3. The Tech-Prep concept should be considered as an addition to the high school curriculum.

4. School districts should seek consideration by post-secondary institutions for advanced credit for work accomplished in vocational education programs.

5. Periodic meetings should be held between vocational educators and post-secondary technical educators during which articulation processes, problems, and needed changes are discussed.

CONCLUSION

We live in an unusual time. Nations of the world are communicating, interacting, trading, and competing among themselves as never before in history. The closeness of the world population--nationally and internationally--and the competitiveness among business and industry have had an effect on each citizen in terms of economic health and the quality of life. As a part of being competitive in the national and world markets, South Carolina has taken action toward improving its educational system. A tremendous effort has been mounted to improve the basic academic skills in education. This is good.

The danger in this fine effort to improve the basic skills is that other vital elements of the educational process might be overlooked or damaged. Creativity in students must continue to be cultivated; individual learning styles need to be honored; young bodies need to be tempered through athletics; leadership needs to be developed; individual talents must be loosed and not lock-stepped in a melting-pot curriculum; people need the skills necessary to make a living for self and family; all must be provided a chance for maximum growth. As provision has been made to improve the basic academic skills, effort must continue to foster the other vital elements in education.

Vocational education is an essential part of the high school education for many students. Opportunities to participate in vocational education must be kept open for these students. Keeping these opportunities available might create a need for change in some instances, or renewed flexibility, or creative thinking, or extra efforts in cooperation, but effective initiative must be maintained to assure that those who need and desire vocational education get it in high quality. If unusual action is needed in this unusual time to accomplish this end, take it.

This document presents possible obstacles that might hinder students from enrolling in vocational education programs. It also suggests strategies and procedures to overcome these barriers. There may be other stumbling blocks that are not mentioned, or strategies that are more effective in a specific local situation than those suggested. The hope is that this document will serve as a resource and stimulator for effective action in assuring that every student who seeks and/or needs vocational education will have a ready opportunity to have those needs satisfied.